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The Army Medical School, Washington, D. C.

The Army Medical school of Washington, D. C., is the creation of surgeon general George M. Sternberg, the present and active surgeon general of the United States army.

The public generally are not familiar with the duties of the officials at the seat of government; so they know little of the conditions that exist in the medical department of the army, that is located here. They do not know how a man becomes surgeon general; what his duties are, and how he may advance certain measures, and thereby become an active power in the line of some good work, or how he may quietly let the office run itself, and simply be its official head, with little interest in any measure outside of the actual and present duties of the hour.

Of late years we have had surgeon general after surgeon general who have come under the latter class; and yet is was no fault of theirs; it was the system and not the individual. The system that prevailed for many years was, on the retirement of the occupant of the office, who had reached the statutory age of sixty-four, to select and honor those who were the oldest in age as well as service, and give them the benefit of retiring in a few years, with the high rank and pay of the office. The result was that the surgeon general was almost always some man of advanced years who had very little interest, or time for anything outside of the routine duties of his position. For all the years, from the time of the war, till about 1889 there was only one exception to this rule; and that was surgeon general Baxter; but he only lived about a year after his elevation to the high position, so practically his occupancy of the office was similar to all the others.

There was no fault with the men; they were all good men and able surgeons, but the system was wrong, and under such a system they were quite powerless to do more than they did.

Soon after Mr. Cleveland became president the second time the office of surgeon general was made vacant by the regular retirement of one of the old officials, who had reached the age required for him to resign.

There was an effort made to continue the old system, and to appoint another of the honorable and elder officials, who would have only a few years to serve. But it seems that Mr. Cleveland decided to try a new system, and to take some younger man, who would have more years in the office in which to be something more than a mere official

head. So he chose Dr. George M. Sternberg, who, though some six or seven years younger than the average, in line of promotion, was old in service. For he entered the service at the very beginning of the war; and was active as an army surgeon all through the war of the rebellion, and was even high on the list as regards rank, and that is quite an important thing in such matters, though not all important.

In prior years the next in rank to the surgeon general and assistant surgeon general, and of the list that the surgeon generals were generally taken from, were known as "medical directors"; but of late years this class has received the title of "deputy surgeon general." Before being advanced to the position of surgeon general, Dr. Sternberg was one of the "deputy surgeon generals." So it will be seen that he was no new untried man. He was old in service if not quite so old as some in years.

When he came to the office he saw the need of more system in regard to the building up the medical service. He undoubtedly had long seen the defects of the old hap-hazard system, wherein the doctor who entered the medical department had little knowledge of the official life and duties of a medical officer of the army. Besides knowing how to attend the sick and wounded as a regular physician, he must have some knowledge of how to prepare and execute official documents, and how to administer

the affairs of his office, according to the system of the war department. During the war there were many men who were good doctors, but they had little knowledge of how to attend to the various executive duties that must necessarily form a part of their routine work. The school that has been founded by surgeon general Sternberg starts the young men aright, at the very beginning of their entering the medical department of the army. They have not to pick up their essential information as they go along, and under the most favorable circumstances be many years in service before they acquire a knowledge of many of their essential duties. When vacancies occur, the young men of the country, who are desirous of entering the service, present themselves for examination, physically as well as mentally. These examinations are of a sound and practical nature, and of such a character as the young man just from the school should be familiar with. His examination satisfactory, he is permitted to enlist as a subordinate member of the medical corps of the army. Under the old system he would now go direct to the army, where he would have to find out many things in regard to

official life, the best he could, and be many years in acquiring this knowledge. Under the new system, founded by surgeon general Sternberg, he is instructed at the beginning in regard to them, even before he reports for active duty. He is instructed in the latest and most improved methods of treating and caring for the sick and wounded, while in the camp, as well as during an active campaign. He is instructed in sanitary and hygienic knowledge, and in the use of the ambulance and how to

transport the disabled soldiers from the battlefield to the Provisional hospital, or on, to the General hospital far from the seat of war, by land or water, as the conditions may require. In comparison with the young men, entering the service under the instructions of this new school, the old army surgeons were indeed inexperienced. They had to learn it all, or all they could, in the best manner they could, after entering upon their active duties.

It would seem that the present plan was far superior to the old. In addition to his training school, surgeon general Sternberg is well known as an author and authority in advanced medical lines. For a change at least it is well to have a surgeon general of this stamp. The work that he is accomplishing through the agency of this medical school will be lasting and highly beneficial to the whole medical corps of the army. Through this agency there is a better

opportunity to select good and proper men; but more particularly after the selection has been made, the advantages of the new system prove the most valuable.

We now have an active and progressive surgeon general. One who is alive to the demands of the age, and of the necessities of the Grand army of which he is the medical head. The school which he has founded is yet in its infancy.

I shall not undertake to foreshadow its future; but let good times come once more, and let our revenue again exceed our expenses, and the chances are that the next step will be to erect a suitable building for this purpose; with some such a name as the "United States Army and Navy Medical School," where medical cadets shall receive all the essential training in regard to the proper care of the soldier while in camp or on the march, and the care of the "sick and wounded," on both land and sea—the general care and proper medical treatment of all who may enter the land or sea service of the Nation.

Such an institution would indeed be an important acquisition to our army and navy.

I. P. N.

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Mr. G. P. Clarke
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